

STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

Evonne M. Klein
First Selectwoman
Town of Darien
8 December 2008

Good evening Madame Moderator, Fellow Elected Officials and members of the Darien Community. Thank you for joining us this evening.

French Marshal Lyautey asked his gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected and advised that the tree was slow-growing and would not reach maturity for 100 years. The Marshal replied, "In that case, there is no time to lose, plant it this afternoon." This year, like most, has been a year with no time to lose. The Board of Selectmen has literally and figuratively been planting trees. Doing what needs to get done today to ensure a better and more secure future.

Last December, the Board of Selectmen unanimously approved the 2008 Board of Selectmen Priorities. Each and every priority reflects the feedback we received from members of the Darien Community, each priority sets direction for the annual budget and each priority continues to move the Town of Darien forward.

The 2008 Board of Selectmen Priorities were:

- OPEN AND COMMUNITY SPACE
- TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION
- DOWNTOWN AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
- HOUSING
- TECHNOLOGY

The Board of Selectmen reaffirmed our Ongoing Government Charges and Responsibilities, which are the daily tasks and responsibilities we, as your town government, factor into all that we do every day. They are:

- HEALTH AND SAFETY
- PROTECT COMMUNITY INTERESTS
- MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ACCOUNTABILITY
- FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY
- COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

My remarks this evening will focus on some of the highlights of 2008.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Only a few short months ago, we approved the Weed Beach Renovation Project and the new Darien Police Department facility. We believed we would be well on our way with both projects. In response to the economic downturn we held our first Financial Review and Strategy Meeting in October. Board of Finance Chairman Murry Stegelmann; Board of Education Chairman John Boulton; Town Treasurer Joan Hendrickson; the Finance Directors of the Town and Board of Education; Schools Superintendent Don Fital; Administrative Officer Karl Kilduff some members of the Board of Selectmen and I met to review the economic environment, its effects on Darien and to develop a strategy to meet the financial challenges before us.

As a result, we halted all major projects, such as the Weed Beach Renovation Project and the Darien Police Department Facility. Projects under \$100,000 are receiving heightened scrutiny. We also instated a hiring freeze on all non-mandated personnel. As of October, our tax collections have remained on target. Our greatest shortfall is in the conveyance tax revenue. To date we have a shortfall of approximately \$700,000 which is less than 1% of the entire budget.

The measures we have taken thus far have enabled us to fill the gap. Looking forward, we will closely monitor the collections for the January tax bills, hold our monthly Financial Review and Strategy Meetings and our goal is to put forward a Board of Selectmen Budget for 2009/2010 with a projected increase of expenditures around 2.0%.

This year we received over \$2,000,000 in grant funding. We continued to renegotiate contracts and raised fees where applicable. Through the results of this year's revaluation, we realized an increase in tax revenue from the commercial base. One of the goals of revitalizing our business districts is to begin the process of relieving the tax burden from the residential taxpayer.

2008 is a revaluation year and this evening Tax Assessor Tony Homicki has covered the details.

Looking forward Darien will continue to exercise financial prudence. This year we have the opportunity and will submit ready projects to be considered for federal funding under the stimulus package.

OPEN AND COMMUNITY SPACE

Our open and community spaces in many ways, define us as a community. We continue to direct our efforts towards the improvement of our parks and beaches. The renovations to the exterior Pear Tree bathhouse as well as the improvement plan for the Boat Ramp are complete. The Weed Beach front tennis courts were also renovated. This year the Parks and Recreation Department improved their operation, productivity and outreach by creating 2 positions—Supervisor of Parks Maintenance and Parks Maintainer.

In November, the Board of Selectmen accepted a generous gift from members of the Darien Community—a playground for Weed Beach. Thank you for accepting the gift this evening. The playground will be ready for action by early summer.

One of the greatest community concerns is the lack of open space, whether it is used for active or passive recreation or flood mitigation; the community puts a high value on open space and preserving the open space that exists today. As you know, we cannot control or predict when properties will become available, unlike the way we can control when a Town project will begin. This year the Board of Selectmen considered and reviewed 3 properties, which we determined meet the needs of the Town. The Board of Finance has also been apprised and has played an active role in the negotiations that have begun regarding one property. We are awaiting the appraisals on 2 other properties.

In February, the Flood Mitigation Committee made their final recommendation to the town boards. The Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Environmental Protection Commission voted to support the Flood Mitigation Strategy developed by this committee. Significant progress has been made to address flooding throughout the Town since our setback this spring with the rejection of our Baker Field Flood Mitigation Project by the State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). We have built critical relationships with DEP and the US Army Corps of Engineers staff and educated them in the unique challenges Darien faces, which we anticipate will make our application successful. The DEP has also agreed to review our application prior to its submittal in February 2009. We completed our town-wide topographical mapping, hired Milone and McBroom to conduct our town-wide drainage study and have begun the LaForge Road Drainage Project. We are awaiting FEMA approval for 3 projects submitted to the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program – one property acquisition and two elevations totaling \$700,000 in grant funds. The Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) has already approved this application and the last step in this process is federal approval.

The Board of Selectmen approved a land use policy for the 35 Leroy Ave property – to use the property for the building of affordable housing. As a result, the Board voted to issue a Request for Development Proposals and appointed the Community Homes at Leroy Advisory Committee (CHALAC) chaired by Richard DiDonna. The committee has begun proposal review.

Our Town's newest commission, the Darien Tree Commission, has hit the ground running with Wally Pugh as the chairman. The Darien Energy Task Force chaired by Bob Baker came together this year, driven by community members' interest in working with the town to improve our energy efficiency and educate the Darien community on "Green" opportunities.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

The Darien Police Department received its tier 2 accreditation, exceeding its goal of reaching tier 1 accreditation by December 31st. Congratulations to Chief Lovello and the entire force for this accomplishment.

The Darien Police Department (DPD) and the Darien Police Commission continue to address the congestion issues along the Post Road and Noroton Heights as well as speeding throughout town. The DPD received \$25,000 grant for traffic enforcement, the only small town to receive the grant. This coming year will prove to be challenging as 3 State projects will be underway in the town creating detours for motorists and pedestrians. They are:

- The continuation of the Catenary B project that will be completed 10/10/10;

- The Hollow Tree Ridge Bridge Replacement Project—As a component of the Project, we successfully negotiated with the State to synchronize lights on Noroton Avenue to improve traffic flow to ease the inconvenience of the detour;
- The expansion of the operational lanes on I-95 from Exits 11 – 13 began this fall and is scheduled to be completed in Sept 2009.

The rail station improvements continue. After an 18-month Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) review, we began the upgrade of the coffee areas at the Darien and Noroton Heights Rail Stations to bring them up to health code standards. These projects along with the construction of a new ADA compliant restroom at Noroton Heights are expected to be complete late December. The bid has been accepted for the pedestrian stair replacement at Noroton Heights, which is expected to begin this spring.

The Town partnered with Baywater Properties and Darien Revitalization Initiative (DRI) to pave and install new lighting fixtures in the Center Street Parking Lot.

DOWNTOWN AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

This year downtown Darien is ready for the holidays with the opening of David Harvey Jewelers and Brooks Brothers, not to mention Ole Mole and 1020 Post Road, Lucy's, The Darien Toy Box and Coco Shoes. These businesses, along with all the other restaurants and shops in all of our shopping districts, have made a commitment to our community. Please show your appreciation by doing your holiday shopping in Darien.

The Darien Chamber of Commerce stepped in to continue the momentum of DRI and to bring it to all business districts by re-establishing the Retail Committee. The Board of Selectmen is grateful to the staff and volunteers of DRI for their

commitment and enthusiasm. One and all should be proud of what has been accomplished in a short period of time.

HOUSING

The Board of Selectmen approved an Affordable Housing Policy for the Town, a Housing Trust Fund and supported Inclusionary Zoning Regulations. We are currently reviewing a draft Affordable Housing Plan for the town. The Cottage in Darien is expected to open late winter of 2009, thus beginning the implementation of the land use policy for the Senior Center property.

TECHNOLOGY

The Darien Website Committee is driving efforts to expand the e-government opportunities for residents. We secured a \$12,000 grant from the Darien Community and Technology Foundation to aid in funding a new approach to our website which will provide new ways for residents to interact with the town government, provide services and give us their input.

ONGOING GOVERNMENT CHARGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Board of Selectmen accepted the unanimous recommendation of the Advisory Board of Health and hired a full-time Director of Health, David Knauf, giving Darien a full-time health department. We also secured a \$25,000 grant through Stamford Health Systems to assist with the Director's salary. The department continues to keep compliant with inspections and we look forward to new initiatives.

PROTECT COMMUNITY INTERESTS

We have been monitoring some long-term projects and I am happy to report some have been completed:

- The CL&P Glenbrook Cables Project is complete and has been activated. Our work and communications with CL&P paid off in that project problems were few.
- Regional transportation issues—as vice chair of the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) along with Reese Hutchison as our representative on the South Western Regional Planning Agency Board of Directors, Darien has strong advocates working on behalf of the Town and region.
- The proposed Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Airspace Redesign—Darien is a member of the Alliance for Sensible Airspace Planning. As Co-vice chair of the Alliance, we have a seat at the table and continue to monitor the status of the lawsuit. Attorney General Blumenthal continues to be at the ready for all of our towns.
- Shellfishing in Darien—this summer the town participated in the survey that was conducted by the State Department of Agriculture. We have identified some problem areas along the shore at Pear Tree and will continue to work with the State to resolve these issues.
- Charter Revision—was completed this summer. While the community voted in November not to accept the new charter, the Rules Committee of the RTM has discussed taking the issue up, as mentioned earlier this evening.

MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ACCOUNTBILITY

Each year we continue the progress made in this area. With the arrival of our new Administrative Officer Karl Kilduff, we implemented bi-monthly staff meetings to set standards, ensure open communications among staff and to continue to track all Town projects.

The Board of Selectmen now receives monthly updates from the Department of Public Works Director Bob Steeger on the status of our flood mitigation projects.

The Board has taken on a new initiative by appointing liaisons to various committees and commissions to open the lines of communication. Selectwoman Linda Santarella has been appointed to the Commission on Aging and Selectwoman Callie Sullivan has been appointed to the Planning Zoning & Housing Committee of the RTM.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Board of Selectmen continues to expand opportunities for community members to get involved, and contribute their talents to improve our Town.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Board of Selectmen unanimously approved the 2009 Board of Selectmen Priorities: They are:

- FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY
- OPEN AND COMMUNITY SPACE
- HUMAN SERVICES
- DOWTOWN AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
- TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

CONCLUSION

The Board of Selectmen continues to prioritize issues that are of the utmost importance to the members of our community. We have taken on issues that others before us have not—such as flooding - and picking up where administrations of 20 years ago left off – such as affordable housing. As leaders and members of the elected boards we have come together on many issues to work towards solutions - to mitigate the impact the economic crisis has on our community, storm water management, flood mitigation and affordable housing. Our town continues to make great strides and we must not stop the progress. We are cognizant of the economic environment in which we are currently living. The Board of Selectmen will continue to do what we always do to move our town forward by being fiscally responsible; by securing other sources of funding such as grants, stimulus packages and by forming private/public partnerships.

Thank you to our Town staff and our volunteers for their efforts this year.

And, thank you to the members of the Board of Selectmen for their dedication and willingness to put politics aside and serve the members of the Darien community. Last year I expressed my confidence in the ability of the members of the Board of Selectmen—in their leadership, their experience and their commitment to make a difference—to make Darien the best that it can be for the community we serve—it is worth repeating this evening.

On behalf of the Board of Selectmen - Happy Holidays.